

EUROPE: THE SCARS OF HISTORY, AND THE THRESHOLD TO FESTIVE DAYS

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1. Introduction

Europe and Geography. But, is it History that always documents Geography? We are far removed from Determinist concepts, and moreover Reality is not divided nor broken up into disciplines, but is made up of facts, and facts become a scientific concreteness when they create problems, as Lucio Gambi once mentioned (1973).

And there are demonstrations, happenings, and relational schemes whose work in the forming of the landscape is more significant, more conspicuous and more dynamic than is the work of physical phenomena.

The sequence could derive from cultural reflexes, from faiths, from the religious life, from production and consumer modes, from the degrees and quality of interpersonal relations and from the consequent construction of the rules of living together. In other words, from traditions and ways of life, as defined by Vidal de la Blache. It would be better to say, perhaps, from structures that assume substance like the comprehensiveness of values, institutions and social classes.

Space in ancient cultures is a path that winds across the world. At all times its representation reflects the values and the fundamental conceptual categories of a culture. The introduction of perspective reproduces the relations of the visible world: a visual metaphor? When, at the end, that perspective world fell into pieces, it was as if an earthquake had thrown into confusion a precise network of scenes that beforehand had been regulated in every cultural area. The form taken by the consequences inserted lively settings and new consciousness. New constituting negativism appeared too, in a vast series of phenomena: in physical fields and in architectonic spaces. What was lost was an obscuring of the distinction between sacred space and other space: the value by then defined by aesthetic sensibility or by usefulness, far from the sanctuaries of privilege, of power, of promise no matter how certain.

The tensions traced out the distance between the reality that made haste, and a past that moved much more slowly.

Alternatively, culture generated enchanted or horrific worlds, established creative interventions in the real historical-social fabric, and became the space for the realization of a full understanding; it exorcised exclusions and prevented an aggregation of local myth. World-culture, precisely, for new hybrid anthropologies, like the exploration of a co-presence of different and antithetic languages, in a field of new trans-communicative scenarios. With the geography of the will, which is also the geography of this cultural aporia, amongst identical unrest and many-spatial effects, amongst the geometry of flux, permanence, and atopia, in acute self-nostalgia.

Describing or being re-acquainted with the territorial bases of human subjectivity, fusing geographic-factual objectivity with cultural subjectivity, will give us the sense of place without that triviality with which it is often burdened, almost as if it were a precious refinement, but instead with the symbolic richness of what it represents. The landscape of planned options will not only be a visual landscape, but above all an emotional one.

With a culture that is the meaning, the sum of our gestures, a culture that very much resembles a verb conjugated by different people who, in a creative way, at different times and with different means, have access to symbolic things.

In such a way the stratification of our life and experiences is represented: the reconstruction of the *senso del luogo*, the spatial perception of objects cannot but be the viaticum towards the territorialization of collective action.

The landscape of the memory ends appearing distant, alternative to the sights and sensations of the present. And it is in inhabiting this distance that perhaps it will be possible to

understand the density of the mobility of the forms that goes with the different mental course that it assumes, transforming the reality of the object.

Is the life that we have not lived lost? Writing, books, places where the experience of the world, histories, things, and people, reveal themselves in the past and enter into our present. A memory-landscape, then, that scans what has happened with the full irrevocability of judgement, and relentlessly (painfully?) nails each one of us down to his past. The road as a metaphor of life. The mirror, iconostasis between subject and object, between sign and meaning, as a metaphor of the mind.

As if, on a chessboard, the writer should face his game with the world, with life, with things, occasionally with the oxymoron of the absurdity of reason, painfully, tracing a visual metaphor along the paths of research. The world, precisely, the combination of relations maintained with diversity, with superficiality: it is culture that roots man to his territory, that accentuates his ties, that clarifies his links. The geography of the view, then, capable of understanding the density and the quality of the roots, but also the processes of up-rooting.

And so, holding that the visual landscape should be or should give a complete synthesis means having partial and inadequate vision, because non-topographically configurationable realities would be rejected, and along with them, all the meanings. To remain with the man-environment relation, even the results of good government or bad, because as Gambi says, for example, re-reading our territorial matters, they state possible truths concerning an Italy that is collapsing, that is submerging, and cities that are shriveling in processes of relentless decline, etc.

And then, History. Exactly because environment outlines subtend historical values (Gambi 1972). Those values able to make matters apparently disconnected and heterogeneous meaningful. Values that will be examined through the examination of man-made actions. At times a back-stepping history-desire, that is, a projection of the present into the past, in a sort of "presentismo" (Le Goff), in order to decipher the totality of social space. A united whole in which all is correlated: in this totality, religious, political, domestic, legal and economic bodies find expression, above all differing ways of production and consumption.

And why not also return to Hobsbawm's invention, as a process of ritualization and formalization: "resort to ancient materials in order to construct traditions invented in a new way, meant for ends just as new"?

Evident stratagems, sometimes, even of social engineering, in order to give more bulk to a project, for future effectiveness.

"All historians, then, no matter how different their objectives might be, participate in this process to the extent in which they contribute, in more or less a conscious way, to create, to demolish, and to build anew images of the past."

Excluding - obviously - Orwell's limited affairs, and Borges' book-burning, which, however, are often a temptation.

At any rate, as Braudel mentions, a geography that does not want to consider itself a distinct world must be able to think in terms of space and social reality, along with the history hidden within it. In this way, and only in this way, shall we be in a position to reason geographically on Europe. Taking for granted readings that, precisely, are inevitably permeated with "presentismo", or by the ideological stratagems of invention, and attempting to reply to Chabod's question on how we have acquired the consciousness of being Europeans.

Is it really necessary to say, along with Ruggero Romano in a self-evident way, that we are European because we are European?

Has Europe a strong geographical meaning only, of rich tradition but poor in content ?

Certainly, perhaps we shall be able to say it, should we only return to Carolingian projects, short-lived and faded "before really germinating."

Or to the literary republic of the Humanists, or to the unification effected by travelling, by the Grand Tour, "for which, in any part of Europe, no European can be completely an exile (E. Burke)"?

And, instead, beginning from the XVIII Century, the idea of Europe has taken shape not so much in relation to an intimate realization of a deeply-felt European identity, but as a

challenge to the identity of the others, the non-Europeans. Then the widespread relations will vanish away, in an easing off of the sense of diversity.

But when, Chabod asks himself, did the inhabitants of European soil begin to consider themselves, and with themselves their own land, as something fundamentally different ?

What are the foundations of cultural unity, or, anyway, of Europe as an organization blessed with its own coherence? We shall not dwell upon its endless analysis, but let us seize upon the sense of its conclusion : *“in the formation of the concept of Europe and of a European feeling, even the complexity of the course of events, in the decisive period of that formation, cultural and linguistic factors have had an absolute, indeed exclusive, pre-eminence.”*

And so, why turn to the European consciousness as a differentiation : to Europe as a contraposition? It is like the ideologist's ego which becomes aware of itself when in collision with the non-ego. A geographical non-ego, but also different according to customs, to political organization, etc., using, in the first place, Greek philosophy.

A Europe, instead, that is broadening, little by little.

Cultural intertextures propagate the *lógos*, then the Romans will spread life styles that will interlace with Greek ways and other traditions: they will be the first to mark out the range that a unifying geopolitics will complete - we have reached the end - in a sort of early experiment in a global dimension of the melting pot.

And so was the diffusion of Christianity and the Jewish Diaspora, up to a certain moment underground or marginal, above all the second. Then Christendom, in a long non-unilinear journey, amassing falls, contradictions, and tensions. And this will be the Europe of movement, of circulation, to use Gottmann's example. In the division of geographic space, iconologies for Gottmann will represent the marginal, the excluded, the immobile, the enclosures, the territorial enclaves, all substantial systems of resistance to movement. Icons, then, because masks of themselves, in a representation that does not possess the dimension of perspective.

On the other hand, traffic that gets people and ideas moving, shifts goods and capital, in infinite ramifications. And so, it organizes space and helps it flow smoothly amongst junction-crossroads and networks. Fluctual space is a new form of space, though not lacking in locations: as Manuel Castells says, it connects locations through computer networks and computerized transport systems ; it re-defines distance, and cancels confines like the scars of history, but it does not cancel geography.

In the logic of globalization, it is valid for Europe, and also beyond.

From these simultaneous processes of spatial concentration, endlessly processed by the varying geometry of international trends, new territorial configurations are emerging. And there will be a new space, not the death of territories.

Bertrand Badie explained to us that his provocative argument should be read as referring to territories that formed states, as after Westphalia. Nowadays, instead, taking almost the same line as Gottmann, Badie re-proposes for us the present argument, in a wide web of relations, and, once again, territory is the center of attention and interests, exactly when the landing-places of world economy seem to be reduced to nothing, in globalizing logic, an interweaving of relations and motivations of new units, while in the territories identity settings and local systems become stronger.

On one hand, there are those who die even for a tiny piece of ground, and “every minority seeks to translate into an uncompromising territorial claim the desire to make itself known and conspicuous... and war and peace, international order and disorder, seem to depend entirely on the ambition to arrange or to re-arrange the world's fragile geography”; on the other hand, instead, through apparently de-localized reasonings, new global geometries are being affirmed.

And so, Europe appears as a land of transition, a system of relations that is spreading towards the East, right up to the Black Sea, and, in some way, to the South, exceeding its Mediterranean frontier in order to establish a new hypothesis of the Mediterranean region.

And, will the difference be the East, and sub-Sahara Africa?

More complex is the reference to the Mediterranean area. Now, perhaps, it can be said - when it was proposed to take the theme of development back to a Euro-Mediterranean vision that would regain the meaning of its unity in order to shift the center of gravity of European decisions, and to trace out the new centrality of a space for extensive exchange and Euro-Afro-Asiatic communications - that repeated European advances (made also by European Mediterranean countries) will finish, after formulation, in not obtaining significant consequential actions.

The new tendency, though positive for the broadening of the Union, now seems to contribute to lowering the levels of the Euro-Mediterranean enterprise.

The necessary European reconsideration of the transition towards the market and democracy of the East European areas, has ended by postponing hypotheses that gave substantiality to documents to which reference has been made, in a logic incapable of provoking structural incidents.

Matvejevic once more has told us that these endeavors, though appreciable in their intentions, do not absolutely lead to the thought of possible common politics : for, following on the experience of colonialism, to the Southern Mediterranean littoral a marginal participation to the analyses of priorities is intended, to projects and to overall Mediterranean policies.

Nor is it worthwhile returning to the disappointing results of the Barcellona Conference, with its hypotheses of partnership and free exchange. After all, a Mediterranean region or an inter-regional frontier; at all events, it is as if we were to find ourselves in a sort of schizophrenia: on one hand, the fear that the Southern area, with its tensions and unease, with its demographic burden, with all its migratory problems, certainly cannot be resolved applying insufficient policies; on the other, the formulation of proposals that confine themselves to suggesting interactive cooperation, without completely considering the concrete operative implications, in idle talk that is narcissistically content with the full emphasis of proposition.

In a course, therefore, that has not yet wholly begun, but which, at all events, as Chiodi has written, will not necessarily encounter rigid contrapositions amongst highly polarized civilizations, in conditions of secular confine. And it is Europe that, step by step, experiencing widespread relations to the East and South-East, being the cross-roads, substantially open, even culturally, to Mediterranean bounds, runs the risk of being sucked down into a second politico-economic exclusion, given its position beside its strong, irruptive, and all-embracing West. Geopolitics could therefore, paradoxically, construct limes from the Western side, the side of free trade fundamentals.

A wider Atlantic? Lucio Caracciolo speaking ironically said... *"the United States could soon become aware that, by dint of tilling the European orchard for their own immediate interests, they will find there are no more cherries there to pick."*

Just as complex is looking into the full tissue of relations: as we have written elsewhere, *"The globalization of the economy is breaking the old tie between States and their respective territories, is shattering the idea of the frontier, wearing away individual sovereignties, the unique responsibilities of national governments, and, by the force of things, is inclined to separating the need for substitutive identities, for substitutes for frontiers and micro-countries."*

"Micro-frontiers are invoked in order to give protection to dispersed persons, and, simultaneously, to ease the immersion in the new lack of country and roots which Heidegger once described and which, it seems, globalization menaces or promise" (B. Spinelli).

The liberation of the bi-polar management of the world had established reconsiderations of belonging and identity, setting in motion processes of territorial re-articulation, often accompanied by closures and conflicts. As if, conquests over, in the various ways and grades in which they were fixed, or modified the conditions of need of the preceding order - due to the progressive erosion of the essentials upon which the stability of the international political scene stood - the themes of a new legitimization were re-proposed, in a proliferation of claims of identity, through launching procedures (hoped for, attempted, violently operated ?) of territorial appropriation, of underlining the right to auto-determination, of citizenship re-negotiation (Campione).

And, in the presence of all this, we shall have to agree with Chiodi that the peculiarity of European civilization, in its multi-form manifestations, is really to be found in the cultural pluralism that characterizes its very heart, its universalistic pluralism, in fact. And what importance can be attributed, then, to the definition of identity in writing the Constitution if not in order to point out history's presentiments and tradition's ideological fables? Identity, all the European identifies, are Europe's history, in its overflowing stream. Christianity as discriminating identity? A sort of Sharon's wall? ¹ But not only Christian identity, and not even in Crook's optimistic meaning of the concept.

Amongst other things, we should reflect, apart from hagiographic readings, upon the typical contradictions of misplaced secularization: from the Crusades to the Wars of Religion, to the Inquisition, to violent missionary activities, destroyers of anthropological values, almost a cultural genocide, along with the savage, at times inhuman, processes of colonization, and eventually to the horrors of Auschwitz, not adequately opposed and somewhat fostered by centuries of aberrant and certainly non-Christian anti-Semitism.

On this subject, Citati has said that *"the terrible Islamic anti-Semitism nowadays is relatively recent, and, above all, springs from the obsessions of Christian anti-Semitism."* However, the Pope continues to demand that the European Constitution should expressly state that Europe has Christian roots. As if one should not bear in mind, however, that the impoverished world, the lost world, accuses - together with Europe - Christianity for the wrongs so thoroughly disseminated across the world². Instead - Pietro Citati adds - *"we believe we are living in a moment of triumphant Catholicism, and probably we are living in a world where Catholicism is in its death throes."* And it is as if this being triumphant only verbally takes on the blame for mankind's sorrows.

A similar characteristic, far from being respectful of freedom, only safeguards belonging to one group rather than to another. And is it like approaching a multicultural society without a scrap of good will towards understanding the other? History is not irreparably confined to struggles between fundamentals, consequently to wars, to holocausts, to racial hatred, to reciprocal mistrust (Galimberti).

In any case, however, European history is a great history, in which, as Quinzio would say (1989), "faith helped greatly." Far from being interpreted possibly as an arranging, conserving element, or as a socially static factor, in its innermost nature, historically it has seemed to be a subversive critical force, a mutating force, a commencement of eschatological protest against of every stabilized order, of every given reality. This is so should faith not be confused with religion, in relation to the institutional character that, historically, religions assume, against the original impulse of faith. Have religions, in social terms, historically constructed these transits of faith?³

¹ Going back over the Iraqi course of events, Paul Krugman has written that before the War the political hawks insisted that Iraq was fertile ground for terrorists; at that time it wasn't, but now it is.

² On the horizon, instead, new fundamentalisms, or an ethnic deviation, are reappearing. Precisely because Culture represents an interpretative community, it helps to give a basis of membership and, in the meantime, to provide a source of division and "diversity." One accepts culture in an unconscious way, but acceptance of a "cultural identity" is a conscious act of "self-narration," which happens in relation to a referential choice, to a particular system of meanings. It is in contact with the Other - with the so-called "constitutive exterior" - that the "units" stated by the "identities" achieve meaning; to a language, to a religion, to a tradition (unimportant if real or invented), one decides to accept the moment in which one finds oneself having to compare and contrast the difference (E. Dell'Agnesse).

³ Nowadays the Church asks to be pardoned. On that subject, let us read Bobbio: the Pope continues to request pardon. But pardon does not cancel out anything. The evil that has been done remains, indelible...It is not enough to request pardon for all that has been said against the Jews for two millenia, for antisemitism has been a diffused, common feeling, immensely far-reaching. A reply to the problem of the bad and ill-natured dispensation of justice does not exist...Pinochet will die in his bed, and Anne Frank in a death camp.

Two subjects should come under study: on a lower plane, the confession of guilt, using the language of mortification, of solitude, of plight - limits upon which meditative thought is grafted, the site of moral accusation, imputability; on a higher, "the sapient poetry that celebrates love and joy"; but the impossibility of forgiving replies to the unforgiving character of moral evil (P. Ricoeur).

But, does the Church still need the triumphs of its omnipotent days, as the president of the GIAC, Mario Vittorio Rossi, defined them? As if God should need Caesar. As if Christians had forgotten the evangelical admonition: “*Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you*” (S. Luke, 6, 26).

This is why we consider that certain solemn reminders fail to grasp the essence of a popular drama which is to be fully tackled in recent and controversial historical forces, and in the right and proper, and painful, search for an escape from the tunnel, in a process of liberation. Amongst Catholics, as once again Mario Rossi mentions, there are differing orientations, which, put simply, are: a theocratic-violent, and coercive orientation, that reaches extreme points of obsession; a moderate-liberal one, reformist (everything considered); and a revolutionary-evangelical-conscientious one.

The third orientation, which seeks to read the Gospels thoroughly, perhaps failing to do so, and to disinter the Vatican Council, seems to have no interest in deals between triumphs and power, and does not believe in the days of omnipotence. In answer to the question, in the second chapter of *Ulysses*, Who is God?, Stephen replies: “*a shout in the street.*” And he has just said that history, as a manifestation of an ultimate order, is “*a nightmare from which I am trying to escape*”.

So, is the principle that writing as a salvage of what is forgotten valid? Continually subjecting itself, however, to the pitying, secular examination in its comparison with the past: inventing over again, if better than inventing, with the weight of doubt, with acknowledgement of uncertainty, fragility and pessimism (Ginsburg).

At that moment Europe will be the door. Secularly, mankind’s door is as much an entrance door as an exit. Only “*the door of the gods always constitutes a definite outlet*” (Biraghi).

The wealth of symbolic characteristics that the door possesses, of its limen, lies at the base of a boundless quantity of metaphors relating to change, that is, from the fact that, at a certain moment, in a certain place, something exists and something else exists no more.

“*The door establishes the limit between the outside world and the household world, between the profane and the sacred world, when it is a question of a temple. And so, to cross the threshold means to arrive in a new world*” (A. van Gennepe).

We are treating with symbols, however: the open door through which one can pass does not mean it is an iconostasis. At the most it will take on the repetitive gestures of an ancient rite. A door-instant, then. An instant for everyone. From a symbol of separation to a symbol of communication. As Handke would have remembered us, to sit at the threshold of the house savours of festive days. And it will no longer be a paramount experience, but, at the worst, a mirage of subjectivity, to be considered pertinent.

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And, “the Church, as a visible sociological institutional hierarchy is history, and cannot stand outside history in order to judge it”. Without a prophetic spirit. Affirming that God needs Caesar. For this reason, quoting Quinzio once more (1996), availing himself of the theologian Barth, the Church, for the pleasure of allowing sermonizing and hearing the word of God, and for affording the Christian community the possibility of existing, has nailed Christ to the cross and persecuted his followers. And so, “a religion is a philosophy that makes politics.”

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